

The Loggerhead

A regional Southeast Asia newsletter
covering issues on environment, science, technology and health



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The Southeast Asia Regional Environmental Affairs home page:

bangkok.usembassy.gov/embassy/reo.htm



Karst forest in East Kalimantan, Indonesia © Paul Hartman

U.S. Department of State Trekking to Understand the Rainforests of Borneo

Recently, the U.S. Assistant Secretary for Oceans, International Environment, and Science, Claudia McMurray trekked her way into some of the most biodiverse tropical rainforests on Earth.

Where was she? In Wehea, located in the province of East Kalimantan, Indonesia, on the island of Borneo, a 38,000 hectare former timber concession that The Nature Conservancy, a non-governmental conservation organization, and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Orangutan Conservation Services Program, have helped convert into a locally protected area. Working with the indigenous Dayak communities to gain legal and financial support from district and provincial governments to protect their traditional lands, the Conservancy and its partners were anxious to show a senior U.S. government official why it is important to protect these culturally and biologically significant lands from the growing threats



Assistant Secretary McMurray smiles at a baby orangutan.

to Borneo's ecosystems and the indigenous societies that depend on them.

Assistant Secretary McMurray, along with officials from USAID, U.S. Department of State and representatives from NGOs, the Conservancy and Development Alternatives, Inc. discussed the plight of the orangutan; illegal logging; the role of mechanisms like carbon funds and debt for nature swaps; the need to engage the government and private sector on oil palm and timber issues; and the need to coordinate illegal logging abatement efforts in a consolidated way with both the Indonesian and Chinese governments at the table.

Heart of Borneo Initiative

"Wildlife, trees, mountains, water—none of these things stop at national boundaries," U.S. Assistant Secretary for Oceans, International Environment and Science, Claudia McMurray stated. "So the work of one country, while important, can't sustain the entire resource."

Last month in Malaysia, Assistant Secretary McMurray presented a check for US \$100,000 to the International Tropical Timber Organization for an ITTO project in Sarawak state's Pulong Tau National Park. This project is part of an ambitious "Transboundary Conservation Area" program ITTO is implementing in conjunction with the Kayan Mentarang National Park in West Kalimantan, Indonesia, and will eventually be incorporated into a much larger tri-national conservation effort called the "Heart of Borneo" initiative.

The Heart of Borneo initiative is a plan to conserve 220,000 square kilometers (about the size of Utah) of biodiversity-rich equatorial rainforest that straddle the borders of Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei on the island of Borneo. With assistance from the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF), the tri-country plan envisions the development of a network of protected areas and sustainably managed forests. The area under consideration is largely an uplands zone extremely rich in flora and fauna, where, over the past decade, previously unknown species have been dis-



Clearing for oil palm plantations, one of Borneo's biggest threats to its disappearing rainforests © Paul Hartman

covered at an average rate of 3 per month. The area provides habitat for 54 species listed as endangered or critically endangered by the World Conservation Union (IUCN), including the orangutan and the Sumatran rhino; as well as species such as the Malayan sun bear that IUCN suspects may be endangered, but that have been so poorly studied that there is insufficient data to confirm their status.

The Heart of Borneo initiative, when implemented, will preserve a significant portion of some of the world's richest habitat through the establishment of a network of protected areas and corridors and the promotion of sustainable forest management practices. The U.S. government is very pleased to be able to support this initiative, which will further U.S. objectives under the President's Initiative Against Illegal Logging and the Coalition Against Wildlife Trafficking (CAWT).

In addition to the ITTO funding, during her visit to Malaysia Assistant Secretary McMurray presented a number of other checks in support of environmental projects related to the Heart of Borneo initiative, including \$40,000 for research on Malaysian sun bears and bearded pigs in Sabah state's Danum Valley Conservation Area, and \$20,000 to support the Sabah Forestry Department's Ulu Segama-Malua Forest Restoration Project, bringing the total amount of Heart of Borneo funds from the U.S. Department of State to \$190,000.

U.S. Department of State Supports Green Customs Workshop in Bangkok

Customs officials are on the front lines of our borders—protecting people, inspecting imports and facilitating international trade everyday. Did you know they are responsible for being able to identify everything from hazardous wastes, chemicals and ozone depleting substances to endangered species of plants and animals that are illegal to trade, as well as knowing the provisions of the international environmental agreements that give them authority to make arrests and seizures?!

From September 5-7, the U.S. Department of State, along with the Thai Customs Department, UN Environment Program, and the World Customs Organization Asia Pacific Regional Office for Capacity Building sponsored a Green Customs Workshop in Bangkok to delve into the complexities of the trade in environmentally sensitive commodities. The workshop brought together 25 customs officers from Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, Malaysia and Myanmar to discuss and share best practices on combating the illegal trade of environmentally sensitive commodities in the Greater Mekong Subregion. Participants learned about international agree-



U.S. Department of State's Regional Environmental Affairs Officer, Jim Waller gives opening remarks at the Green Customs Workshop © Thai Ministry of Finance

ments on hazardous waste and chemicals, exchanged ideas and experiences and moved towards developing common tools that they can use to address the issue. Jim Waller, Regional Environmental Affairs Officer thanked the participants for their commitment to the environment and cooperation to find cross-border solutions to halt the illegal trade of environmentally sensitive goods.

For more information, go to www.greencustoms.org

Exploring the Celebes Sea

From September 26-October 16, a group of ocean explorers embarked on an exciting project to discover new species of marine life in the "Coral Triangle", which is home to the richest marine biodiversity in the world. The three points of the "Coral Triangle" extend from the Philippines in the north, to the Solomon Islands in the east, to the Indonesian archipelago in the west.

Specifically, the area of research is in the Celebes Sea, off Mindanao, Philippines. Although there has been some research in the shallows, this was the first time that the Celebes Sea was explored at greater depths. The



A rope cam is ready to be launched over the side of the ship © 2007: Exploring the Inner Space of the Celebes Sea

team may have found a couple unrecorded creatures through diving, bated cameras, and a remote operated vehicle that took samples and shot pictures at depths of up to 2,000 feet. Now back on land, they will consult with specialists to see if they are in fact, new to science. The team is comprised of Filipino and U.S. scientists, journalists and technical specialists, U.S. Department of State Officer Caron De Mars and a National Geographic film crew with plans to make an hour-long television program and a feature article in the National Geographic Magazine.

For more information, go to oceanexplorer.noaa.gov/welcome.html

Forum on Lao-Thai Hydropower Development

The governments of Thailand and the Lao PDR, with facilitation by the World Bank, discussed Lao-Thai partnership in sustainable hydropower development at a high-level forum September 6-7 in Bangkok to which media, civil society organizations, academia, embassies, and international agencies were invited. The Lao PDR's Minister of Energy and Mines, Dr. Borsaykham Vongdara, made opening remarks at the forum. World Bank Country Director for both Thailand and Laos, Mr. Ian Porter, and the Governor of the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT), Mr. Kraisi Karnasuta, followed. Dr. Piyasvasti Amranand, Thailand's Minister of Energy delivered the keynote address.

The forum was a welcome effort to discuss and learn from past hydropower project experiences and to demonstrate more transparency in the two governments' plans for future hydropower development in Laos. These plans are part of a regional trend to build dams for hydropower development in Laos, Burma, and Cambodia, often with Chinese funding. Many of the projects are controversial because planning is not being done in a transparent manner and public and private stakeholders are not being consulted. Furthermore, there are concerns that relocation schemes for dislocated communities are poorly thought out, that environmental aspects are not being considered, that impacts on fisheries resources are being ignored, and that release of water from poorly managed facilities will cause more flooding, rather than alleviate it. By inviting civil society groups, university professors, and third country diplomats to participate shoulder to shoulder with Lao and Thai government officials to discuss the environmental and social impacts of hydropower projects, the World Bank took a bold step towards bringing reason and openness into discussions on hydropower.

Indonesia Launches 2nd U.S.-designed Tsunameter in Indian Ocean

The second Deep-ocean Assessment and Reporting of Tsunamis (DART) buoy in the Indian Ocean was launched on September 19, under the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded U.S. Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning System (IOTWS) Program. The tsunameter station, constructed by the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), includes a pressure gauge set on the ocean floor to monitor sea-level changes and communications equipment to send data via satellite to global networks. Following the launching ceremony in Jakarta, which also included four ATLAS buoys to monitor climate change, the DART buoy was placed off the coast of Padang in West Sumatra at approximately 00N and 890W. The buoys are the latest additions to the expanding Global Earth Observation System of Systems, an international effort to monitor and predict changes in the Earth to benefit the environment, human health and the global economy.

This is the first DART tsunameter to be managed by the Indonesian government, through the Agency for Assessment and Application of Technology (BPPT). The first Indian Ocean DART buoy was deployed off Thailand's Andaman Coast in December 2006. Under the IOTWS Program, NOAA and governments in the region plan an array of 22 buoys that will ring the Indian Ocean and provide the region with real-time data to warn of potential tsunamis.

For more information, go to www.us-iotws.gov

ASEAN Leaders Committed to Environmentally Sustainable Cities

On September 25, Bangkok Governor Apirak Kosayothin, U.S. Ambassador to Thailand, Ralph Boyce and Incumbent Chairman of the ASEAN Working Group on Environmentally Sustainable Cities (ESC), Joseph Hui, welcomed mayors and municipal leaders and representatives from 17 Asian cities to a two-day workshop in Bangkok to develop a strategy for implementation of the ESC Clean Water Framework. Developed in 2003, the Framework aims at achieving increased accessibility and sustainable water supply and sanitation for ASEAN cities.

The workshop addressed common priority areas and challenges in providing safe water and sanitation services, including expanding services, especially to the urban slums, improving the quality of services, and devising sustainable payment and finance mechanisms to support expansion and improvements. Additionally, the workshop allowed municipal leaders from the 17 cities to hear about the different approaches each of them have taken to meet these challenges.



(L to R) Winston Bowman, Regional Environment Director, USAID RDM/A; Bangkok Gov. Apirak Kosayodhin; Ralph L. Boyce, U.S. Ambassador to Thailand; Joseph Hui, ASEAN Working Group on ESC, and Dr. Raman Letchumanan, Environment and Disaster Management Unit, ASEAN Secretariat.

Organized by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the ASEAN Secretariat, the workshop contributes to USAID's Environmental Cooperation Asia (ECO-Asia) program objectives to support the achievement of Millennium Development Goals by promoting improved access to sustainable water and sanitation services.

For more information, go to usaid.eco-asia.org

In the Spotlight: ECO-Asia's Water and Sanitation Program

Marikina City Models Effective and Affordable Solutions to Sanitation Problems in the Philippines

Marikina City in the Philippines in partnership with the USAID is leading the way in developing affordable sanitation solutions. Although Marikina City has transformed its main river, the Marikina River, into a picturesque watercourse lined with grassy parks and bicycle trails, the water quality remains very poor due to untreated sewage, effluent from septic tanks and wastewater from the nearby public market.

With technical assistance from USAID's Environmental Cooperation-Asia (ECO-Asia) program, city authorities and other stakeholders such as the Manila Water Company are working together on a sanitation pilot project that demonstrates effective and affordable models for local government units to meet the country's Clean Water Act requirements.

As part of the ECO-Asia supported program, Manila Water is accelerating and expanding that process by improving the basic management of septic tanks in the City. As one new measure, the City has purchased eight new septage vacuum trucks and recently inaugurated a new septage treatment facility.

City staff have also developed a preliminary design for an interceptor system to collect wastewater from the public market and surrounding downtown area and bring it to a treatment plant that uses low-cost, low-maintenance technology. Manila Water Company has agreed to partner with the city to fund and manage the project, with construction scheduled for late 2007. The Metropolitan Manila Development Authority is now also planning to replicate this project in all of the 17 municipalities which make up Metro-Manila.

Turn on your TV! Wildlife Alliance and PeunPa Featured on Animal Planet and CNN Documentaries

Two exciting documentaries featuring Wildlife Alliance and PeunPa, two organizations working to combat the illegal wildlife trade, give you an inside look into a “sting” operation and the impacts of this estimated \$10 billion a year illegal trade of sharks, elephants, Tibetan antelopes and other endangered or threatened species.

Animal Planet’s Crime Scene Wild is a six-part documentary film series hosted by Wildlife Alliance and PeunPa co-founder Steve Galster which recently won the top award in the Environmental Program category at this year’s prestigious Jackson Hole Wildlife Film Festival.

Crime Scene Wild’s Sharks episode, in which Wildlife Alliance investigates the global shark fin trade, was judged best environmental program for its efforts to highlight a trade that claims the lives of up to 70 million sharks every year, mainly for the sale of shark fin soup.

In the Shatoosh episode, PeunPa staff investigate the trade in shatoosh shawls which can sell for thousands of dollars on the black market. Their high demand threatens the survival of the Tibetan antelope, one of the world’s most endangered species.

The U.S. government-supported ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN- WEN), a network that facilitates cross-boarder cooperation among law, customs, and environment officials to combat the illegal wildlife trade, is featured in the Crime Scene Wild series.

Crime Scene Wild has already aired the first few episodes in Europe, parts of Africa and the Middle East, but will continue to air over the following three Monday evenings. It is scheduled to air



Steve Galster examines shark fin confiscated by an agent from National Oceanic and Atmosphere Administration. © Discovery

in Asia in Feb 2008.

The CNN four-hour series called “Planet in Peril” will air on October 23-25 and cover global warming, endangered species, habitat destruction, and human population growth. In Southeast Asia, Anderson Cooper and Jeff Corwin go to Cambodia’s Phnom Tamao Wildlife Rescue Center supported in part by Wildlife Alliance. The Rescue Center houses over 800 individual animals, which include 74 species of endangered and threatened wildlife whose lives were affected by the illegal wildlife trade.

Both series will reach over 500 million viewers highlighting the need for better trans-border law enforcement cooperation across the globe in order to tackle what has become one of the world’s largest black market crimes.

For more information, go to www.wildlifealliance.org and www.peunpa.org

Upcoming Events

October 2007

- ASEAN-U.S. Enhanced Partnership Biofuels and the Automotive Industry Seminar, October 24, 2007, Bangkok, Thailand
- International Symposium on Avian Influenza: Epidemiology, Basic and Applied Research, October 29-31, 2007, New Delhi, India (www.icgeb.res.in/ISAI/ISAI.html)

November 2007

- Delta 2007, Managing the Coastal Land-Water Interface in Tropical Delta Systems, November 7-9, 2007, Bang Saen, Thailand (<http://delta07.iwmi.org/>)
- The 7th Meeting of Asia Forest Partnership, November 12-15, 2007, Yokohama, Japan (www.asiaforests.org/files/_ref/events/AFP7/AFP7_Index.htm)
- Workshop on Water and Sanitation Planning in Developing Countries, November 16-19, 2007, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (www.idrc.ca/eepsea/ev-115214-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html)
- Mekong River Commission Governance Meetings, November 19-22, 2007, Siem Reap, Cambodia (www.mrcmekong.org/MRC_news/upcoming_events.htm)

December 2007

- UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, COP 13, December 3-14, 2007, Bali, Indonesia (unfccc.int/meetings/cop_13/items/4049.php)
- IPAPI Ministerial Conf on Avian and Pandemic Influenza, December 4-6, 2007, New Delhi, India

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Correction: The June-July 2007 edition of The Loggerhead incorrectly stated that the MRC's 5th annual Mekong Flood Forum was held in Vientiane. It was actually held in Ho Chi Min City, Vietnam.